



Understanding the factors that lead to college success among Alumni with self-reported Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

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Background

- ❖ Seven percent of school children live with Attention Deficit & Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)⁽¹⁾
- ❖ Although ADHD often persists throughout adulthood, little is known about its impacts on college students
- ❖ Results from studies on ADHD & postsecondary education reveal how college demands can place students with ADHD at risk for psychological & academic difficulties^(1, 2)
- ❖ This is of particular concern to the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), where many of the students who present for assistance through the Department of Disability Services indicate limitations related to learning, reading, concentrating, listening, & thinking
- ❖ In response, this formative study was a strengths-based response to the need for improved understanding of not only the barriers experienced by UAF students with ADHD, but the factors that serve to promote their academic success

Study Goal

To gain perspectives from UAF Alumni living with ADHD about the factors that lead to their college success

Theoretical Framework

The research was informed by the **Social Ecological Model (SEM)**. SEM recognizes the reciprocal relationships existing between an individual & his or her environments⁽³⁾

Factors that influence wellbeing can be organized into ecological levels including:

- ❖ **Individual** (e.g., knowledge, attitudes, experiences)
- ❖ **Relational** (e.g., interpersonal relationships, support)
- ❖ **Organizational/Community** (e.g., social climate, norms, regulations, built structures)

Understanding the facilitators & barriers that are within & external to the individual enhances the viability to address the factors that put students with ADHD at risk for non-retention, physical & emotional harm.



SEM Model from: Ryerson.ca

Methods

Participant Recruitment

- ❖ Flyer posted on UAF Alumni Association website & Facebook, & UAF academic department listservers

Data collection

- ❖ Semi-structured, telephone interviews (N=7)
- ❖ Interviews audio-recorded, or notes taken

Interview questions focused on:

- ❖ People, places, & things that facilitated success
- ❖ Advice would give to UAF students with ADHD & UAF faculty/administration



Data Analysis

- ❖ Interviews lasted 45-90 minutes
- ❖ Interview recordings & notes were coded (question by question) using Content Analysis
- ❖ Constant comparison enabled conclusions to be drawn across participants

Ethics

- ❖ Materials & procedures approved by UAF-IRB
- ❖ Participants were offered \$25 Amazon gift card

Interview Findings

Figure 1: Factors described as leading to college success organized by social-ecological levels

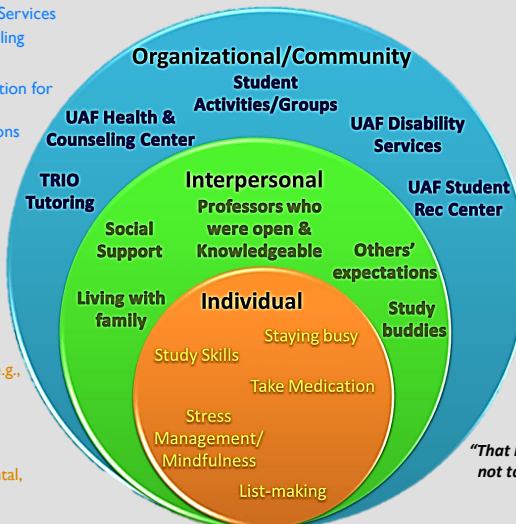
UAF Resources

- ❖ Tutoring: UAF/TRIO Services
- ❖ Therapy, UAF Counseling Center
- ❖ Letter of accommodation for assistance
- ❖ Testing accommodations

"UAF Health & Counseling helped facilitate success, & I called twice a semester, at least, to stay on track"

Study Skills

- ❖ Study skill strategies (e.g., breaking up chapters, recording key words)
- ❖ Write things down to remember
- ❖ Re-taking (developmental, remedial) classes



Social Support

- ❖ **Parents:** encouragement, high expectations, a place to live & focus on school
- ❖ **Other Family:** siblings at school & home
- ❖ **Others:** Roommates, other friends, fraternity brothers

List Making

- ❖ Kept calendar
- ❖ Rely on syllabi
- ❖ Make running "To-Do" lists for day/week

"That list was my life. Do not take away my list."

More Findings

Advice offered to students living with ADHD

- ❖ Don't be afraid to seek help
- ❖ Take small steps
- ❖ Break down assignments into chunks
- ❖ Prioritize your schedule in advance
- ❖ Manage your stress
- ❖ Keep active & engaged in the community/university

"Success is not only about getting your degree but being balanced socially, mentally, & physically. Get engaged in all UAF has to offer."

Advice provided to faculty / administration

❖ Be:

- ❖ Open & understanding to student needs
- ❖ Aware & knowledgeable about resources
- ❖ Ensure:
 - ❖ Students know about services offered
 - ❖ Course work & expectations are clear
- ❖ Allow:
 - ❖ Recordings for note taking
 - ❖ Allow for breaks during longer classes

"Professors are a big indicator of success. Be open & understanding"

Discussion/Implications

- ❖ Participants discussed facilitators to success found at all 3 social-ecological levels (individual, relational, and organization/community). Still, participants required prompting to share positive factors that were internal to themselves
 - **Implications:** Programs & services for students with ADHD should highlight their own strengths & strategies
- ❖ Factors were categorized into social-ecological levels. Nevertheless, most important is the reciprocal relationship among factors & levels – as change on one level will impact change at other levels
 - **Implications:** Programs & services should target change at multiple ecological levels
- ❖ Every participant described how the smaller, supportive atmosphere of the UAF community served as a factor of success
 - **Implications:** UAF can promote & accentuate this factor for other students who might be at risk
- ❖ All Participants attributed their success, in part, to those professors, staff, & administrators who provided support & understanding. Still, participants recounted encounters with non-supportive individuals who posed barriers to success
 - **Implication:** UAF faculty, staff & administrators should be recognized for their positive impacts on students with ADHD. Educational opportunities might be offered to promote & ensure the supportive UAF community.



Next Steps ...

- ❖ Findings will be shared & interpreted with participants via a Findings Forum offered using telephone & Google Hangout.
- ❖ The study will be written up for submission to a peer-review journal

References

1. Weyandt & DuPaul, 2008
2. Wolf, 2006
3. McLeroy, 1998

Special Thank Yous

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